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## REVIEWS.

### HOOD'S LIFE AND POETRY.

THE POEMS OF THOMAS HOOD. Edited by Alfred Ainger. Eversley Series.  
2 vols. Macmillan & Co. 1897.

Mr. John Morley's "English Men of Letters" series was brought to a sudden termination, leaving for less competent and less careful editors at least a dozen of the authors of our language who deserved inclusion, Shakspeare for one and Steele for another and Emerson for a third. Mr. Morley was hospitable to only one American, Hawthorne; and he opened the door of his library to no ladies, not even to George Eliot or Jane Austen or Maria Edgeworth. But he did allow one woman writer to contribute to his series, and when the late Mrs. Oliphant wrote the volume on Richard Brinsley Sheridan she perpetrated what is perhaps the very worst biography of the nineteenth century. Beyond all question, it was the poorest book in all Mr. Morley's collection.

The best book in Mr. Morley's collection is not so easy to declare. There are those who would pick out the editor's own "Edmund Burke," some proclaim the preeminence of Mr. Austin Dobson's "Henry Fielding" (which Lowell praised so warmly); but I believe that a larger number would declare in favor of Canon Ainger's "Charles Lamb." That little book has always seemed to many of us the model of a brief biography—exact, well proportioned, sympathetic, and full of flavor; and the volume in the "English Men of Letters" series was doubly blessed in that it was excellent in itself, and in that it led to the complete edition of Lamb, which Canon Ainger has given us since, and which is a marvel of loving knowledge and of adroit craftsmanship.

Now Canon Ainger lays us under another burden of gratitude. He has written the life and edited the poems of

Thomas Hood with the same skill and the same scholarship, with the same taste and the same tact, as he had already shown in writing the life and in editing the works of Charles Lamb.

Hood was Lamb's friend. He was office editor of the *London Magazine* while that periodical had the honor of publishing the "Essays of Elia." Canon Ainger quotes in full Hood's graphic account of his first meeting with Lamb, and of the characteristic pun which the latter made when invited to stay to dinner. They were both punsters, Lamb and Hood; they were both richly endowed also with a deeper humor; and they were in their several ways both imaginative and melancholy. To trace a closer relation would be easy; but perhaps the most obvious point of contrast was the high skill of each in the "transcendent" pun, as Coleridge called it when he wrote to accuse Lamb of having written the "Odes and Addresses," which were really Hood's (with some aid from his brother-in-law, Reynolds). Canon Ainger argues that Hood's puns, like Lamb's, were not merely witty; they were often essentially humorous, and sometimes even pathetic. Here they resembled the best of Dr. Holmes's paronomastic triumphs, and both Lamb and Hood would have relished mightily the Doctor's account of his "Visit to the Asylum for Aged and Decayed Punsters." In Lamb and in Hood and in Holmes, to use the apt phrase of Canon Ainger, "it is the drollery of these puns, rather than their ingenuity, that gives them their peculiar flavor." (I., p: xliii.)

"There is no life of a man faithfully recorded but is a heroic poem of its sort, rimed or unrimed," said Carlyle, writing of Walter Scott after the gallant fight was over. Hood's life, like Lamb's, was a poem of this heroic sort; and Canon Ainger has recorded the one as faithfully as the other. His biographical sketch of Hood fills eighty pages of the first of these two volumes. It is obviously a labor of love, like the earlier life of Lamb. It is also work well worth doing, now at last thoroughly well done. The manly struggle that Hood waged all his days with ill health and

with poverty is here set forth in its simple pathos, with no pressure on our sympathies. The biographer holds no brief for thick and thin defense. He shows us why it was that Hood wrote too much and repeated himself often, and did not do justice to his own genius. He drops out of account most of Hood's prose and all of his one novel, "*Tylney Hall*;" and so he centers attention on the man himself, and on what the man did best.

It is by what a man does best that he has a right to be judged, no doubt; yet it has been Hood's misfortune that many of those who have judged him have not acted on this theory. He has not received due recognition, partly because he made a double appeal to posterity as a humorist and as a lyricist; and partly because, being a humorist, he had had to pay the penalty the world imposes on all humorists: the refusal to take them seriously, even when their serious work is far finer and rarer and richer than their comic writing. His editor tells us that Hood "did two things excellently, which, in the general view, are incompatible. . . . He was a 'funny man,' as well as a lyric poet of real originality and earnest aims, and was so admirable and original in the former and more abundant character that it probably caused many to regard the serious verse as merely an ambitious bid for a reputation which it was not in the writer's power to achieve."

We venture to think that the consensus of criticism is now placing Hood where he belongs by right of genius. Mr. Stedman, in his "*Victorian Poets*" (p. 76), had been keen to see "the grace, simplicity, pathos, and spirit" of Hood's exquisite ballads; and he asserted his belief that "some of them will be read when many years have passed away," and that "they will be picked out and treasured by future compilers as we now select and delight in the songs of Jonson, Suckling, Herrick, and other noble kinsmen." And Mr. Austin Dobson, in Ward's "*English Poets*" (IV., 532) declares that not a few of Hood's songs and ballads "have that rare merit of tunefulness which is as much in the matter as in the meter;" and he found that Hood, here and there,

touches the keenest chord of pathos. Canon Ainger does not force the claim when he says that "as a poet Hood cannot be placed in the first rank, or even in the second, but genius is no question of place in a class list;" and a little before this Canon Ainger had ventured to suggest that "Hood's peculiar faculty justifies the use of the word 'genius.'" (I., p. lxxx.)

Space here fails to discuss the editor's acute analysis of the relation of wit to poetry, and of his adroit defense of the poetry which is "at once beautiful and witty," to use Sydney Smith's pair of adjectives. Nor is this the occasion for any individual criticism of Hood's poems, serious or comic or seriocomic or pathetically humorous. Here in these two volumes they are sorted out and set in order, the first volume containing the serious poems; and the second, the poems of wit and humor. A dozen pages of notes make clear the contemporary allusions with which the satirical odes bristle, and explain the circumstances under which some of the chief poems were either written or published. Hitherto Hood's works have been accessible only in the six-volume edition (seven volumes if "Tylney Hall" be included), published some thirty-five years ago, in which all sorts of prose and verse were tossed together helter-skelter and higgledy-piggledy. To any one who has loved Hood's verse as long as the writer of this review, it is a delight to see it sent forth at last in an attire worthy of its intrinsic merit.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

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A NEW LIFE OF RENAN.

THE LIFE OF ERNEST RENAN, by Madame James Darmesteter. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1898.

The author of this book, which is rather a history of the man than of his ideas, is better known to English readers as Mary Robinson, who some years since married Renan's colleague at the Collège de France and has since become mistress of a French style as graceful as that with which she was wont to charm her countrymen. Indeed, her English has suffered a little in the process, for one is never complete